

REFERENCE LIST

ParneII, Thomas. 1755. "Piety (The Vision)." Essay.
In Poems in Verse and Prose. Ireland.

"TeIevision, n." 2023. The Oxford English Dictionary.
<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/198769?rskey=vU2I2N&result=5#eid849185031>.

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ENDNOTES

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ParneII, Thomas. 1755. "Piety (The Vision)." Poem.
In Poems in Verse and Prose. Ireland.

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ParneII, Thomas. 1755. "Piety (The Vision)."

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This refers to its first appearance in the limited archive
of the Oxford English Dictionary.

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Nobody seems to like TV anymore. I mean free-to-air television; I mean the one with the ads for fast food chains and shaving cream and car insurance, slicing up the janky programs which call into question who on earth is behind them, funding them, watching them. Like the shows you glimpse on Netflix, which seem superfluous, like filling or crumbling grout. The ones you skim past, barely registering, perhaps occasionally raising an eyebrow to, like, *as if this rubbish has smattered itself before me, wriggling its way into a space already brimming with things infinitely more deserving of my attention.* The transitory stuff that no one has time for anymore, that the world has moved beyond relating to.

It's something about the inconsistencies and uncertainties. You're at the mercy of what's airing and therefore what will be bumming about in your mind. With so many contestants already, it feels preposterous to simply sink down into something which risks being unworthy, especially when every action molds a perception of who you are as an individual in this world. There is so much resentment attached to that which is deemed unfruitful, which sits around in your day and seems to give nothing effectual in return. Though there has been a movement towards 'trashy TV' lately – friends lounging about together to yelp and cackle as they watch the tanned inhabitants of Love Island sit by the pool trying to seduce each other and, perhaps more importantly, the cameras – the practice of mockery makes it okay. The interpersonal bonding makes it recognisably valuable. People are often quick to assert those points, to emphasise the irony of their joy. They would never do it alone, never let the glowing screen envelop them in such trite and hokey content, lest they lose themselves to a state they didn't want to belong to.

The concept of "guilty pleasures" has always sat strangely with me; the gracious admission of shame for enjoying that which is deemed uncouth and undignified. It's another crafty excuse – one step away from insisting it's only a social activity – to retract your love for something considered embarrassing. You declare your self-awareness, your understanding that the practice is silly, and therefore reinstate your seriousness to the stratosphere. *That* passion isn't in keeping with who you really are.

The earliest recording I could find of the phrase was in Thomas Parnell's 'Piety' (1755), in which an angel visits the sleeping poet to urge him to bump up the sanctimonious motifs in his writing. The angel chastises those who concern themselves with "wasteful revel," asking Parnell to:

*'Despise the fervours of unhallow'd fire,
'Where wine, or passion, or applause inspire,
'Low restless life, and ravings born of earth,
'Whose meaner subjects speak their humble birth;'*¹

In other words, let yourself be distinguished from the common fools who fold to the gratification of simple delights, and instead, use your status to:

*'Unpaint the Love that hov'ring over beds,
'From glitt'ring pinions guilty pleasure sheds,'*²

From this inaugural appearance in English literature, a guilty pleasure was that which was unpious, which only those who caved to their commiserable humanity ever indulged in.³

My quick search in the OED also pulled up a quote from a *N.Y. Times* article, published in 2006, describing a program as a "guilty-pleasure television series."⁴ Between the mid-eighteenth century and the twenty-first, there has been only a marginal shift in the phrase's definition: a guilty pleasure is no longer only one which is admonished by God, but now a debauchery which is cherished in private and sheepishly admitted to in public. The *N.Y. Times* referring to a television show in this manner is not a rarity. Certain programs are often subjected to this kind of scrutiny. No longer are we only tentative in our love for drink and fame, but as well for the media we spend our time on.

A guilty pleasure is a comfort: of things watched or eaten or listened to or read. It is something deemed excessive – beyond the realm of what is 'right' or 'productive' or 'good for you.' No longer is the dogma specifically one which coaxes you into righteousness before the eyes of some holy judge, but one which assumes a correct way to live. That judgment has folded itself into the societal; piety shifted from moral critique to public critique.

You'll mess up my algorithm! You attest when someone taps the search bar on your Spotify account. What you mean is: *everyone will see the live update of me listening to Taylor Swift's self-titled first album and it will shatter the persona I've carefully carved as an Oblique 90s Electronica devotee.* The thought makes you wince, but when *Love Story* plays in the supermarket, you nod your head and mouth every word to the rows of dehydrated spaghetti.

I don't mean to be nasty. Laughing at clout behaviours is a guilt trip in itself, only feeding into the self-consciousness, the desire to be seamless and unfailingly on-brand. We can't help it – the public eye makes us stake our place, to want so desperately to delineate the position we wish to be seen standing.

I don't want to stand, and especially not before an audience – at least not often. I'd rather not recall the audience at all, lest they are inadvertently summoned. I want to curl up on the couch with a slab of chocolate and roll through channels on the television, not looking for anything in particular. The night outside is tucked away into darkness and I'm squashed against the cushions, with no need to mind for another soul who mightn't be as engrossed as I am in the episode of *William Shatner's UneXplained*. A reproduced painting of a crying boy is causing house fires across the nation and William is cruising up the path of a suburban house on a Segway. It's ridiculous and it isn't promising enlightenment. It isn't marking itself in the history of television. It's passing through, bumbling about the evening, making no claims or guarantees beyond this moment. We're on the same wavelength. Nothing needs to be achieved or performed. No one needs to be remarkable. It's a pocket of time no less crucial than any other, when I can be gross and gape with chocolate between my teeth at infomercials, happen upon foreign films I'll one day rack my brains trying to remember the names of, repeat the luscious sentences of Nigella Lawson to an empty room as she garnishes the picturesque dishes I have no desire to ever make. No angel comes to smite me.

I'm stewing here, relishing in a quiet love affair with the world, spilling over the demarcations of a character. No one else is here to see us, all unpolished and unkempt. I'm not presenting to anyone, not even thinking about it. Anthony Bourdain is speaking tonight, and I am only here to listen.